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ABSTRACT

Step-by-step instructions for locating material in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database are provided. Following an introduction, information is presented in three main sections--manual searching, computer searching, and using search results. Subdivisions under manual searching describe who can or should do a manual search of ERIC, how to locate ERIC microfiche collections, procedures for conducting a manual search--including how to use and understand notations in the ERIC Thesaurus and ERIC monthly indexes--and searching for a specific document in ERIC. The second section, "Computer Searches," contains subsections on when to do a computer search, types of information that will be retrieved from such a search, cost, tips for getting good results, and computer search turnaround time. The final section, "Using the Results of ERIC Searches," describes how copies of ERIC documents and journal articles can be obtained. A six-entry resource section cites additional ERIC publications on the ERIC system. (LP)

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FINDING WHAT YOU NEED IN ERIC

ERIC Fact Sheet No. 3

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education

Boulder, Colorado

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855 Broadway
Boulder, Colorado 80302

FACT SHEET NO. 3

August 1981

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Finding What You Need in ERIC

Many educators realize that resources in the ERIC data base can meet a variety of research needs. The ERIC collection of more than 400,000 documents related to education contains a wealth of information that is unavailable or hard to obtain elsewhere — speeches, conference papers, state and local curriculum guides, project reports, research reports and reviews, and unpublished articles and dissertations. It's probably safe to say that anyone with an educational research problem — from a student with a term paper assignment to a teacher looking for specific kinds of classroom activities to a doctoral candidate preparing a dissertation — would find ERIC a useful source of information. This fact sheet contains general information and specific tips for finding what you need in the ERIC data base.

The first step in retrieving relevant documents from ERIC is to decide on a search strategy. There are two ways of searching ERIC: manually and by computer. Both methods provide access to the same basic information. Which method is better for any given situation depends on a number of factors: the nature of the research topic, the number and variety of documents needed, and the location and accessibility of an ERIC collection. The advantages and limitations of each type of search, and the procedures involved, are described below.

Manual Searches

Who can or should do a manual search of ERIC? You can search ERIC manually if you have access to either a complete ERIC collection or the two cumulative ERIC indexes, *Resources in Education (RIE)* and *Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)*. A complete collection contains, in addition to the indexes and other research aids, microfiche copies of the majority of the documents indexed in *RIE*. Thus, you can examine documents immediately by using a microfiche reader and even copy relevant pages, if a reader/printer is available. If you have access only to the indexes, you will not be able to immediately examine copies of the documents. However, the indexes contain abstracts of ERIC documents in addition to information about how to order microfiche or paper copies.

You might consider a manual search of ERIC if you are still in the process of selecting a specific topic or narrowing your topic focus. By scanning the subject-area indexes in *RIE* and *CIJE*, you can get an approximate idea of the number and kinds of ERIC resources related to your topic. Having a general idea of what documents are available will help you devise an effective search strategy if you later decide to order a computer search.

A manual search is the quickest and easiest way of locating resources if you need only a few documents on an extremely specific topic. In some cases, a manual examination of the indexes may reveal that no documents on a particular topic have been entered into ERIC.

Where are ERIC collections located? There are approximately 750 complete ERIC collections in the United States and abroad. Most of these are housed in university libraries; others are located in ERIC clearinghouses, general libraries, and government agencies. To locate the nearest collection, check with a major library in your area or request a complete list from ERIC/ChESS (855 Broadway, Boulder, CO 80302) or the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility (4833 Rugby Ave., Suite 303, Bethesda, MD 20014). A list of libraries and resource centers that subscribe to *RIE* and *CIJE*, the ERIC indexes, can be obtained from the Subscription Agent, Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (Washington, DC 20402).

What are the procedures for conducting a manual search of ERIC? Begin by asking a staff member of the library you are using for a copy of the *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors*, which explains how documents are classified and entered into the data base. Carefully read the "Hints for Thesaurus Use" on the inside front cover, and read the general guidelines to indexing and retrieval on pages xii through xx in the introduction.

Next, look up the major concept of your topic in the "Alphabetical Descriptor Display" of the *Thesaurus* to find out if ERIC uses the same scope-note (SN) term to index documents on the topic. For example, documents about global education are indexed in ERIC under the term "global approach." If ERIC does not use the same term, scan the *Thesaurus* for similar or related terms. The hierarchical display of "used for" (UF), "broader terms" (BT), "narrower terms" (NT), and "related terms" (RT) should help you zero in on the indexing terms used by ERIC which best fit your concept.

After you have identified an indexing term, look it up in the subject index of *CIJE* (if you want to locate journal articles) or *RIE* (if you want other kinds of documents). Under that term, you will find a list of document titles and ERIC acquisition numbers (six-digit numbers preceded by "EJ" for journal articles and "ED" for other documents). Record the *numbers* of titles that interest you.

Abstracts and descriptions of documents are arranged by ERIC acquisition number in the "Document Resume" section of *RIE* or the "Main Entry" section of *CIJE*. Numbers are assigned chronologically; thus, the most recently entered documents will have the highest numbers. For each ERIC document, you will find information in this section about title, author(s) or editor(s), developer(s), publisher(s), publication date and place, number of pages, and availability in addition to an abstract of the contents of the document. In addition, a list of "descriptors" provides further information about the focus of and topics treated in the document. The document resumes in *RIE* also contain information about the type of publication — whether it is a speech, research report, curriculum guide, etc. If you have trouble interpreting information in a document description, check the sample resume in the front of the index.

What is the best way of finding out whether a particular resource is in ERIC? Documents are also indexed by author and by institution (for ED documents) or periodical (for journal articles). If you know the approximate date of publication, start with those volumes of the indexes which

cover that approximate time period. However, keep in mind that for various reasons some documents are entered into ERIC either prior to or substantially after publication.

If you know only the title of a document, or perhaps only part of the title, the only feasible way of quickly finding out whether it is in ERIC is to request a computer search. Although you might be able to locate it by checking various subject index headings, that process might be extremely time consuming.

Computer Searches

When is it best to search ERIC by computer? If you do not have physical access to an ERIC collection, a computer search may be your only option. A computer search can be ordered by mail or telephone from more than 450 libraries and other organizations located throughout the United States. A directory of organizations that provide computer searches of ERIC can be obtained from the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility (see address on first page).

A computer search can save you a lot of time, especially if your topic is broad or if you need a great many resources. It is the best way to identify all the available documents on a topic, and it is the only feasible way to determine whether specific documents have been entered into ERIC.

A computer search is the method of choice if your search topic is complex or consists of several major concepts. For example, if you are looking for resource materials (concept 1) for teaching U.S. history (concept 2) through humor (concept 3) to 11th-graders (concept 4), a computer search can identify documents that specifically fit that description. In addition to retrieving documents by identifying terms, types, and other categories not available to manual searchers, a computer search can locate documents by means of key words in the descriptive annotations.

What do you get from a computer search? The information yielded by a computer search varies according to the nature of the search request and the policies of the organization from which you request it. In most cases, you would receive a computer printout listing the journal articles and/or ED documents identified by the search. Some organizations provide only a list of titles in a basic search; other provide all the information in the ERIC indexes. A computer search will *not* yield actual documents; however, it does provide information about how to obtain them. As a special service, the search specialist may be able to order an on-line copy of an actual document, although this procedure is relatively expensive.

How much does a search cost? The cost of a search is set by the organization that provides the service. Some organizations have established a fixed price; others charge according to the number of items yielded. An ERIC/ChESS search, which yields full index information as opposed to simply titles, costs $25.00 for up to 50 citations. If more than 50 citations are requested, there is a charge of $0.10 for each additional listing. Duplicate printouts of searches already run are available from ERIC/ChESS for $10.00 each.

If you are affiliated with an organization that provides ERIC search services, you may be entitled to a special rate or discount. University libraries, whose services are usually subsidized, may offer very low-cost searches to students and instructors. Employees of some schools or school districts may be eligible for special prices through various kinds of cooperative arrangements.

What are some tips for getting good results from a computer search? The usefulness of a computer search will depend on the skills and knowledge of both the search specialist and the person requesting the search. Although it might seem that the expertise of the search specialist is a factor beyond your control, you can improve your chances for getting good results by requesting your search from an organization that has a professional interest in your specific topic. For example, search specialists at ERIC clearinghouses are likely to be highly skilled at conducting searches related to subjects or disciplines that fall within their scope assignments, if only because of their familiarity with ERIC resources in those areas.

You can help the search specialist help you by structuring your request according to the following guidelines:

—Describe your topic in detail.

—Indicate grade level(s), if pertinent.

—Describe the type(s) of materials you want — for example, conference papers, speeches, teaching guides, journal articles, research reports.

—Define any words or terms that have a special meaning to you or in the context of your topic.

—Explain how you will use the information provided by the search.

How long does a computer search take? The turnaround time between requesting a computer search of ERIC and receiving a printout of the results can vary from one day to about three weeks, depending on the organization providing the service. If you request a search in person, you can usually be present while the search is run, and the citations can be printed out on-line immediately. Most searches are ordered by mail or telephone, and the organization providing the service will order off-line printouts which are then mailed to the persons requesting them. The latter method, which is cheaper, requires at least several days. The maximum turnaround time at ERIC/ChESS is ten days.

Using the Results of ERIC Searches

How can copies of documents be obtained? The procedures for obtaining access to actual copies of ERIC documents vary, depending on whether they are journal articles (EJ numbers, indexed in *CIJE*) or other documents (ED numbers, indexed in *RIE*). Both indexes contain detailed descriptions of these procedures.

Most ED documents are available for viewing in microfiche (MF) at libraries that subscribe to the ERIC collection. These are stored in filing cases by acquisition number; ask a library staff member to help you find and/or retrieve any fiche you wish to examine via a microfiche reader. Microfiche copies of such documents can also be ordered by mail from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Paper copies (PC) of some ED documents may also be purchased from EDRS. Information about the availability of every ED document is included at the beginning of the abstract, along with a code indicating the prices for both microfiche and paper copy. If a document is not available from EDRS, the source and price, if known, are provided.

Journal articles are not available in microfiche from ERIC because they can usually be obtained from other sources. If your local library does not have the relevant back issue of a journal, you can order photocopies of most EJ documents from University Microfilms International. Ordering information and the addresses of publishers of periodicals are provided in *CIJE*.

ERIC Resources on Using ERIC

Ely, Donald P. *A Guide to Audiovisual Resources About ERIC*. Syracuse: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1979. ED 179 248.

Harrison, Charles H. *Information for Education Writers From ERIC*. Princeton: ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, 1977. ED 166 263.

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Laubauer, Marilyn R., comp. *A Glossary of ERIC Terminology*. Syracuse: ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1978. ED 168 506.

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